

REMARKS FOR ADMINISTRATOR BOLDEN
STENNIS SPACE CENTER 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Oct. 15, 2011

Thank you, Patrick (Scheuermann). I understand you are now Stennis Space Center's longest sitting director since the legendary Roy Estess. That's really something. We'll talk about Roy a little later, but I want to congratulate you. I really like what you've done with the place.

SSC used to be referred to as NASA's hidden jewel. I stress "used to be known" because the legacy of your work has garnered national attention and Stennis is now a centerpiece for the agency with testing activities in direct support of the new Space Launch System as well as our Commercial Crew Program. You've been creating smoke and flames for the nation's space program for 50 years! I and the entire astronaut corps -- all of us from the very beginning -- owe you a great debt of gratitude.

I want to thank the entire Stennis workforce -- I wish they could all be here tonight -- for their dedication, their consistency, their professionalism. Time and again you've made it possible for the big shows in Florida to happen. Without you, we'd never have reached the moon or built the space station.

You are the nation's premier rocket engine testing facility and a unique federal city. Since the 1960s, the American manned space program has ridden on rocket engines tested and proven flight-worthy right here.

From the earliest days to today's Space Launch System (SLS) heavy lift vehicle, we couldn't have a space program without the essential work of Stennis. I'm sure many of you know the quote attributed to Dr. Wernher von Braun, who affirmed the importance of Stennis test facilities when he said, "I don't know yet what method we will use to get to the moon, but I do know that we have to go through Mississippi to get there!"

Certainly most of you are well aware of the storied history of this great center, but being a bit of a history buff, I like to talk about it. You guys conducted the first space shuttle main engine test way back in 1975. I was still working on my master's degree as a Vietnam veteran with not a single thought about going to space yet.

It was here that just a few years back, in 2004, those same engines reached a space milestone – one million seconds of test and flight operations. That of course, was after thousands of tests and more than 100 missions. That first space shuttle main engine test at Stennis in 1975 marked the beginning of 34 years of testing for all 135 shuttle missions.

In April 1978, Stennis conducted the first test of the space shuttle main propulsion test article with three main engines configured as they are on a space shuttle orbiter during flight.

All three main engines were fired simultaneously on the B-2 Test Stand to prove the space shuttle propulsion system flight-worthy.

So I can say that I personally benefited from the excellence of this center, and what you enabled each of my crews and me to achieve in space.

Let me take a moment to thank all of the employees, astronauts, contractors, and policy makers who were the backbone of the extraordinary Shuttle program. We honor and respect your contributions and we are committed to working with you as NASA embarks on an even more ambitious mission.

Today, NASA is on the cusp of a new era of space exploration and a rejuvenated and reinvigorated Stennis Space Center is absolutely essential to our progress moving forward.

Stennis will play a major role as we prepare to venture into deep space while we develop new commercial partnerships for access to low Earth orbit (LEO) and the International Space Station (ISS). The Center will test both engines that will power the new SLS – the RS-25 D/E and the next-generation J-2X.

The J-2X is being developed as an upper-stage engine that can fire in space and carry humans beyond LEO. Stennis already is conducting early tests on the engine and building a new stand to conduct simulated high-altitude tests on it as well.

Stennis also currently testing the Aerojet AJ26 engine that will power Orbital Sciences Corporation's commercial cargo flights to the ISS. Other such agreements are in the works as part of Stennis' diverse rocket engine testing that includes not only NASA, but also DoD and commercial customers.

Those commercial flights are an essential component of our path forward. They will enable NASA to focus once again on the big picture and the farther horizon. They'll help open up an entirely new segment of the economy that will become a job-creating engine for decades to come.

When the A-3 Test Stand at Stennis is activated, it will be the only test stand in the country with the combined capabilities to conduct long-duration tests on full-scale engines at simulated altitudes up to 100,000 feet, and to gimbal, or rotate, the engines during the test as they would operate during flight. This is just one of Stennis' amazing, unique capabilities.

I know the path to where we are has been challenging. But I always knew I could count on you. I knew that you would be critical to any future path forward for human space flight. We're now at the point where our heavy lift rocket is moving forward.

The Orion crew capsule it will carry is also making steady progress, and the future destinations to which we aspire are in our sights, from the moon to asteroids and Mars. Whoever is here 50 years from now helping a century of operations at Stennis is going to be talking about how Stennis was there at the very beginning of the testing of rockets that took humans farther than they've ever been before – how you couldn't get to Mars without going through Mississippi!

But back here on Earth, at a time when we are all trying to accelerate the nation's economic recovery, Stennis is doing just that for this area – it is providing jobs and strengthening the economy of this region.

Right now Stennis supports more than 23,000 local area jobs and has a \$616 million direct economic impact within a 50-mile radius. That's what I call a Grand Bargain.

So, we are excited about the future of NASA, human space flight, our burgeoning commercial partnerships, and the central role that Stennis will play in everything we do.

But Stennis is much more than rockets!

Here you have world-class project management to support NASA's science and technology needs. You're home to the largest concentration of oceanographers in the world!

The Stennis Applied Science & Technology Project Office manages NASA's Gulf of Mexico Initiative, created in 2007 to enhance the region's ability to recover from devastating hurricanes.

The Applied Science & Technology Project Office is conducting 15 research projects in the Gulf of Mexico region to monitor sensitive ecosystems like coastal marshes and barrier islands, and environmental parameters such as water quality.

The NASA Education Office operates an Educator Resource Center that offers materials and training to school teachers throughout the Louisiana-Mississippi region. Some 800 teachers a year attend onsite and offsite workshops sponsored by the center.

As I mentioned, Stennis is a federal city, home to about 30 federal, state, academic, and private organizations and several technology-based companies. The companies and agencies share the cost of owning and operating this facility, making it more cost effective for each entity to accomplish its independent mission. It's a model for collaboration and leveraging resources.

Our NASA Shared Services Center is here, and they keep the agency running by consolidating procurement, human resources, information technology, and finance activities from across the agency in one central location. Believe me, I appreciate that!

In short, Stennis is a national asset, and a national treasure.

I want to commend the Partners for Stennis for the collaborative work they do, building bridges among many groups that are passionate about our space program. And I'm delighted to be here as you kick off the Roy S. Estess Leadership Award.

It's fitting that there be an award in honor of Roy, and to recognize innovators and volunteers who devote their time and energy to space out of the sheer love of it. I look forward to learning who will be the first recipient.

I want to thank and congratulate you all again on the occasion of this 50th Anniversary! Here's to many more successful years!